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EDITORIAL

Several people have told me that they enjoy reading this publication, especially those among the privileged few who receive printed copies by snail mail. They have also told me that they are 'thinking about' writing articles for it. The sooner they send me their excellent and eagerly awaited writings the better, so that we can maintain our position at the cutting edge of armchair ufology.

WHY A CLOSE ENCOUNTER CAN BE QUITE A HEADACHE

Signs and symptoms

In some close-encounter cases witnesses report bizarre experiences, which are sometimes followed by signs and symptoms, such as violent headaches, nausea and vomiting, and diarrhoea. In most cases, though, symptoms following the experience appear to be minimal or completely absent. Where unpleasant symptoms do appear, many ufologists tend to attribute them to the effects of getting too close to the UFO and being subject to some mysterious, harmful radiation. It does not occur to them that there could be more mundane explanations for at least some of those close encounters which are not obvious hoaxes.

Classical migraine

Consider the following incident which is reported to have taken place in Brazil in 1965. A 15-year-old boy was lagging behind a party of youths who were going to a cinema. As he passed across a piece of open ground he heard a strange hum and saw two cones of white light in the sky and then saw two roundish craft land not far from him. Entities emerged, inspected one of the craft, then re-entered and the craft took off at a fantastic speed, disappearing in a few seconds. The boy joined his companions in the cinema, but soon developed a violent headache, which lasted for five days. (1)

Here we have a very strange experience, followed by a prolonged headache. We are not told if there were any other symptoms but we are informed that a doctor eventually treated the boy for a 'disturbed heart'. However, this report appears to be a description of what is known as a classical migraine.

Most people are aware that migraine usually consists of a violent headache accompanied by nausea - a 'sick headache'. However, in a classical migraine these symptoms are preceded by what is called an 'aura', which usually consists of disturbances of vision, but can in some cases be of a highly complex nature.

Examples

The information about migraine for this paper is taken from the book *Migraine* by Dr Oliver Sacks. (2) It is interesting to compare some of his case histories with other accounts which have been interpreted as encounters with UFOs. For example, compare the following reports. The first is taken from an account by one of Dr Sacks's patients. (3) The second and third are taken from the UFO literature. (4)

It was a late summer afternoon, and I was winding along a country road on my motorbike. An extraordinary sense of stillness came upon me . . . I felt that this summer afternoon had always existed and that I was arrested in an endless moment. When I got off the bike, a few minutes later, I had an extraordinarily powerful tingling in my hands, nose, lips and tongue. It seemed to be a continuation of the vibration of the motorbike . . . the vibrating sensation was growing stronger every moment . . . My sense of vision was then affected . . . The hum of crickets was all around me, and when I closed my eyes, this was immediately translated into a

hum of colour . . . After about 20 minutes . . . the visual world resumed its normal appearance . . . I had a 'come-down' feeling and the beginnings of a headache.

Clay, Alabama - Summer 1962, 1800

Dean Self was walking home along the Clay-Palmerdale road after visiting a friend, when he heard a sound 'like a wind in a pine tree', then an unnatural silence. Looking up he was terrified to see an object 30 m above him. It was 12 m long, with a cabin about 2 m high at the front. It had a smooth white surface with multicoloured lights on the underside, which pulsated in rhythm with a muted throbbing sound which seemed to affect his whole body. The object suddenly vanished, the 'wind' was heard again, then the natural sounds returned.

Sandling, near Saltwood, Kent, England - August 1962, 2330

Bruce Leggatt (17) had just ridden past Sandling station on his scooter on this very warm night, when the air turned cold. He became afraid and accelerated. Looking over his shoulder, he glimpsed a yellow oval object, rough in outline, which extended over the width of the road (c. 6 m). He became more afraid, feeling that he was being watched. This feeling persisted for some time after he turned on to a main road.

It must be realised that these descriptions are not necessarily accurate accounts of what was experienced at the time, because of the difficulty of recalling and describing them clearly. Dr Sacks writes of ' . . . free-wheeling states of hallucinosis, illusion, or "dreaming" which may be experienced during intense migraine auras, and be manifest as confused or confabulatory states of which the patient retains imperfect recollection. These states are composed of coherent, dramatically-organised series of images, and are usually compared by patients to intense, involuntary daydreams or daymares.' (5)

Dr Sacks also emphasises the exceedingly strange nature of many aura phenomena and he notes that ' . . . the sense of strangeness is frequently accompanied by a sense of profoundly-disturbed time perception'. (6)

Scotomata

A type of visual hallucination commonly associated with migraine auras is the scotoma, which develops as it appears to move across the field of vision. 'The advancing margin of the scotoma often displays the gross zig-zag appearance which justifies the term fortification spectrum . . .' (7) A report from the UFO literature, of a case investigated by BUFORA, which seems to describe migraine scotomata, concerns a man who recalled having seen 'a ball with spikes' coming out over Lake Lucerne while on a school trip about 30 years ago. His recent sighting occurred one evening when he saw through his kitchen window an object on a patch of soil in the garden which was 'wine red in colour and about the size of a drinks tray'. It remained on the ground for a few minutes, then suddenly ' . . . it took off, like a coin being flipped, and spun up into the air, revealing its underside with a series of "reinforcements" on the rim.' It then seemed to head for the window and gave out a blue flash. (8)

The report of this sighting is accompanied by a small sketch showing an oval object surrounded by zigzags. It bears a remarkable resemblance to a reproduction of a painting described as 'a classical zigzag fortification pattern' in Sacks's book.

Isolated auras

In this case the witness reported that he suffered no ill effects, which means that, if it was a migraine aura, it was not followed by the usual headache, or other symptoms and signs. This is an important point. Sacks points out that it has been estimated that the incidence of classical migraine is about one per cent of the general population, but this gives no indication of the incidence of isolated auras, which are probably much more common. Obviously, if the aura is not followed by any unpleasant symptoms it is unlikely to be diagnosed as migraine or anything else. Most people do not like to consult their doctors when they have no symptoms. Sacks mentions discussing the subject with a colleague, who immediately recognised his diagram of a scintillating scotoma and said that he had often seen this himself as a young man, but that it never occurred to him that there was anything unusual about them; he presumed that everybody saw such things. (9)

More than one witness

Many ufologists will no doubt consider it odd that that I should propose migraine as an explanation for

close-encounter UFO reports in view of the fact that a high proportion of them involve two or more witnesses. However, the presence of other persons does not necessarily rule out migraine as a factor involved in generating the reports. Few of the write-ups of multi-witness cases give any detailed, separate accounts by all of the witnesses. Sometimes other alleged witnesses are strangely reluctant to talk to investigators. In other cases one suspects that the witnesses have concocted a dramatic story from a minor incident by a process, perhaps unconscious, of confabulation, aided by faulty and confused memories. Also, the strange behaviour of the person experiencing a migraine aura could evoke hysterical reactions from other people present. Someone with a forceful personality might persuade others that an unusual or unexpected light is really a flying saucer. (This effect will be familiar to many who have indulged in UFO skywatches.) There are many such possibilities.

Conclusions

I am not suggesting that all, or most, close-encounter reports have anything to do with migraine. I have no time for catch-all explanations which can be force-fitted to any case that comes to hand. There are many rational explanations for UFO reports and I think that this one should be added to the list.

I merely offer this paper as a basis for discussion and investigation. All I am saying is that there appears to be much in common between descriptions of migraine auras and many reports of experiences which have been interpreted as close encounters with UFOs.

I suggest that those who wish to argue about this subject should read Dr Sacks's book first, if possible. Comments and information are welcome, particularly from medically qualified readers.

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IS THE ETH FALSIFIABLE?

Martin S. Kottmeyer

There have been individuals frustrated by the behaviour of ufologists who level the charge that their beliefs are unfalsifiable. Advocates say this or that case is unexplainable or this or that pattern cannot be explained by conventional means. Solve the case, show the pattern is explicable, do they accept this negates their position? They will probably just come up with a new case or pattern. This is annoying behaviour, but does it really constitute evidence of unfalsifiability? We are dealing with the proposition that intelligent beings are surreptitiously flying around the world and are actively trying to prevent their detection. Maybe the evidence is ambiguous, but aren't we allowed the faith that someday someone will build the better mousetrap that will capture the proof that will silence the cynics?

Efforts to find them in photographic sky surveys have met with no success. Efforts to videotape aliens capturing repeat abductees don't seem to be working. One researcher has suggested that maybe we can put radar-tracking devices on abductees and capture their transport to hovering craft. Maybe someday spy satellites can be used to monitor potential abduction sites and capture images of their craft. Okay, what if these are implemented and also fail? Will the advocates accept defeat or fall back on 'selective visibility' and other magical supertechnology? Is there any conceivable test that will prove the ETH wrong?

If the ambition is for an absolute all-doubts-and-all-potential-excuses-removed surefire alien mousetrap, I suspect such a thing is indeed inconceivable and the ETH potentially unfalsifiable. Let's suggest however that a more modest conception of falsification can be said to exist. Call it a more pragmatic and operational, a what-have-you-done-for-me-lately? approach to falsification. Has the ETH provided us with anything useful or interesting in the way of prediction?

The answer to this is surely no. Nobody has yet come up with a working saucer drive

mechanism from a consideration of the testimony of witnesses despite several attempts. (1) ETH proponents have offered theories that they hoped would predict when the next flap would take place. Early proponents talked about UFOs monitoring atomic tests and the Air Force even set up a reporting net at a test site to test that possibility. Nothing was seen at the test site. Predictions that saucer reports would increase in response to future scheduled tests were total failures. Some offered predictions that saucer sightings increased when Mars got close to Earth. The bolder predictions failed and the weaker ones got results equivalent to random chance. Still weaker interpretations involving flaps as a way to desensitise humans to their fearful presence are not consistent with well-known findings in human psychology. Recent flap scholars are silent about these failures and seem to insist flaps are not psychosocial in nature, yet they have proposed nothing to suggest the ETH can explain the timing of flaps. Jerome Clark has recommended Bullard to me as my superior in these matters, so, Challenge Time! How about it, Eddie, can you give us a useful ETH theory of flaps? (2)

Proponents have repeatedly proposed that the phenomenon was escalating in a pattern that suggested we would soon either be invaded, there would soon be a mass landing, or there would soon be no doubt of their existence. (3, 4) All have failed. There have been many suggestions that flying saucers are, in one sense or another, omens for potential catastrophes. Each ufologist seems to offer a new variant: supernova (Heard), magnetic fission of the planet (Scully), Earth knocked out of orbit (Keyhoe), mass A-bomb attack (Keyhoe), cosmoplastic Earth nova caused by L-bombs (Wilkins), extermination due to inferior ethics (Michel), cosmic storm (Jessup), catastrophic changes in the Earth's surface (Lorenzens), war of the worlds (Steiger and Whritenour), a disaster beyond imagination (Fawcett), the violence of the final generation (Keel), climactic confrontation between Good and Evil involving the inner earth (Trench), collapse of civilisation (Clark and Coleman, Rogerson), Binder (rampaging natural forces), nuclear Armageddon with psychic time ripples (Randles), black hole collision generating a universal dissolution to which not even the gods are immune (Andrews), sterility (Fowler), environmental collapse and death of living Earth (Mack), catastrophe, hybrid integration and takeover, and control by big-bug aliens (Jacobs). (5, 6) All have failed to date, thank goodness.

As early as the 1947 Wave, there was already talk that the government would soon reveal what the saucers were. Louis E. Starr, commander-in-chief of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, revealed on 5 July of that year that he was expecting a telegram concerning the 'fleets of flying saucers' and it would 'help explain the discs'. (7) Keyhoe, in his first book, thought he saw a pattern in Air Force statements that suggested to him the government had an 'intricate program to prepare America - and the world - for the secret of the disks'. In his view, 'The official explanation may be imminent'. (8) This has been a continuing refrain among ufologists (*FSR*, 1957; Lorenzen, 1974; the Blums, 1974; Walter Andrus, 1983). (9) (Psychics, contactees, and numerous minor figures have also predicted this, (10, 11) but these should probably be considered off the ledger in assessing the value of the ETH in serious ufology.) A very significant possibility for why these predictions fail is that the ETH is false and the government has no more to reveal than it already has.

The upshot is that the ETH has generated dozens of predictions which time has tested and found invalid. It has been falsified consistently where it counts - how will it prove its importance to mankind. The landing never comes. The invasion is postponed. The flaps don't conform to schedule. The government stays mum. The revolutionary saucer drive is never built. The world doesn't end. This may not be falsification in an absolute sense, but it is surely falsification in the ways that matter most.

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